

San Francisco de Asis
Mission Dolores Church
San Francisco, California

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Northern California

Historic American Buildings Survey
Irving Morrow, District Officer
Wm. H. Knowles, Dep. Dist. Officer
369 Pine St., San Francisco, Calif.

MISSION SAN FRANCISCO DE ASIS (MISSION DOLORES)
San Francisco, California

Owner: The Roman Catholic Archbishop of San Francisco, a
Corporation Sole.

Date of Erection: Cornerstone of Church laid: April 25, 1782.
Church dedicated: April 3, 1791.

Builders: Planned by Spanish Missionaries; constructed by
Indian neophytes.

Present Condition: Of the original group of buildings, the
Church alone remains. It is in excellent condition,
and, with the exception of minor additions and ex-
tensive repairs, is the original building intact.

Number of Stories: One story with balcony.

Materials of Construction: Walls, adobe, plastered each side;
floor, cement; ceiling, wood; roof trusses, steel;
roof, tile. (Floor, trusses and exterior plaster
are recent; remainder is original.)

Other Existing Records: Bancroft, H.H.: History of California.
Bolton, H.E.: The San Francisco Colony - U.C. 1931.
Eldredge, Z.S.: The Beginnings of San Francisco.
Englehard, Fr. Z.: Missions & Missionaries of Calif.
Information was also obtained from photographs in
the Library of the Society of California Pioneers;
from officials and records of the Archdiocese, and
from the architect and the builders who supervised
and executed the restorations of 1916-17.

Additional Data: (Page 2, etc.)

Additional Data: San Francisco Bay was discovered by the first Portola exploring party in 1769. The site was not occupied until the Anza colonizing expedition of 1776. The Mission was founded by Father Francisco Palou on October 9 of that year. It was named for the founder and patron saint of the Franciscan Order, San Francisco de Asis (Saint Francis of Assisi). Nearby was a creek, which, because discovered on Viernes de Dolores, or Friday of Sorrows (the Friday before Palm Sunday), had been called Arroyo de los Dolores. From this arose the name Dolores by which the Mission has been popularly known.

The pueblo (not founded until the fourth decade of the nineteenth century) was originally called Yerba Buena, but later it was changed to San Francisco in order that the names of bay, mission and town might coincide.

The original church, built immediately after the founding of the Mission, was, as customarily, a temporary structure of logs, hewn timbers and slabs plastered with clay, with a roof thatched with tules and grass. Recent excavations carried on by Harry Downie and others tend to indicate that it was located a considerable distance south of the present mission church.

On April 25, 1782, the cornerstone was laid for the permanent church by Fr. Palou, who was in charge of the Mission. The Church was dedicated April 3, 1791. Its walls were four feet thick, built of sundried adobe brick, made by Indians, of playa soil or a mixture of local clay, sediment and straw. These brick were made in forms four inches deep by eight inches wide

by sixteen inches long and were laid up in clay. The completed adobe structure was about forty-four varas long and thirteen varas wide. (Early measurements are given in terms of the Mexican vara, equivalent to slightly over thirty inches. This measurement was also used in surveying grants and other transferences of property. A large part of the survey of the City of San Francisco was based upon it, which accounts for the present uneven dimensions of feet and inches of many parcels of property.)

The original floor was of clay, burned brick, tile and wood. All this has been supplanted by a concrete floor, except in the baptistry, where a few of the old tile remain.

The roof trusses were of hewn logs lashed together at the joints with rawhide. These trusses are still in place, although steel trusses have recently been inserted actually to carry the loads. The original wood ceiling beams and planks are also intact. As nails were not available, wood pegs made of native hardwoods, such as manzanita and madrone, were used instead.

About 1794-5, handmade tiles were laid upon the roof of the mission as well as upon adjoining minor structures since destroyed. It is a popular legend that these tiles were molded by the Indians over their bare thighs and afterwards cut to size and kilned, but this seems inherently improbable, in view of the fact that the tiles vary considerably in shape,

and are often of a size which would be impossible to mold in this manner.

About 1800, the reredos was installed. This, together with statues of the Saints adorning it, was probably made in Spain and reached the Mission by way of Mexico. Some historians maintain that it came from an old church in Mexico. It was transported in sections overland on the backs of mules and oxen. It is a most extraordinary piece of Spanish Baroque decorative art, possibly without equal in North America, outside of Mexico. It fills the entire west end of the church, where its exuberant richness contrasts brilliantly with the architectural simplicity of the building proper. At the time of its installation it must have constituted a startlingly sophisticated phenomenon in a frontier settlement. It still retains the original pigments, stains, gold leaf and lacquer with which it was finished. Also remaining are the two statues of St. Francis and statues of St. Joachim, St. Michael, Santa Clara and Santa Ana.

Prior to the installation of the present wood reredos, two niches in the adobe wall at the rear of the sanctuary served in its stead. These can still be found behind the reredos with their original color decorations. These decorations are of the same pattern and color as the present side wall decorations.

The two side altars were made and installed about 1810.

The south altar contains the statues of San Luis Rey and San Bonaventura; the north one, San Juan Capistrano, San Antonio and San Francisco Solano. The small shrine on the south wall containing the statue of St. Francis was made locally in 1927. The carving is an imitation of that on the reredos. The old confessionals are still in place in the side walls.

There is an old grave covered by a marble slab in the floor of the church, containing the remains of the Noe family. The remains of Lieutenant Jose Moraga, first Commandant of the Presidio who died July 13, 1795, are buried under the sanctuary.

Although the King of Spain had promised to give bells to each mission established, delay in the location and completion of San Francisco de Asis probably resulted in the presentation of the first esquilon or call bell by Mendoza, Viceroy of Mexico, as his name and the date, 1792, are cast in the bell. Later the two larger bells, each dated 1797, were installed. The first bell was originally arranged to swing, but all the bells are now stationary, bolted and lashed in place with rawhide. The iron clappers are modern and are operated from the church floor by cords.

The old cemetery adjoins the south side of the church and is the burial place of a number of pioneers. Many of the graves are

unmarked. The oldest marked grave, 1830, is that of Don Luis Arguello, first governor of Alta California under the Mexican regime.

At the height of its prosperity, during the period of about 1814, to 1824, the Mission property extended six leagues north and south and three leagues east and west. The buildings formed a quadrangle, the church and dwelling of the padres occupying two sides of the southeast corner. The balance of the buildings were used for a pottery shop, storerooms and other requirements.

A daguerreotype of about 1849, in the Turrill collection, now in possession of the Society of California Pioneers, shows the east wing still standing at a right angle to the church and immediately adjoining its east facade on the north. Apart from this group of buildings and separated from them by a spacious plaza were the dwellings of the neophytes and soldiers arranged in regular order. The Presidio supplied guards, the soldiers and their families being quartered in these buildings.

Even before the secularization of the missions and the creation of the pueblos in 1834, this Mission had begun to deteriorate. Although the church remained intact, the other buildings were greatly encroached upon by intruders and settlers who had either squatted upon the land or had speciously bought or leased it at the instance of Governors Pico, Alvarado and others, and their commissioners.

These proceedings were a part of the scheme for confiscation which was declared illegal by the U. S. Supreme Court after

California was admitted to the Union. The situation was rectified by President James Buchanan, who under act of Congress granted and conveyed the remaining properties, in accordance with surveys made by U. S. Land Office, in trust to Bishop Sadoc Alemany, on March 3, 1858. (The Church is at present in the possession of the Roman Catholic Church of San Francisco.) Portions of the old mission were converted into a refectory, dance hall, and adjacent property was occupied by saloons, a brewery, gambling halls. Cock-fighting, bear-fighting and horse racing were carried on nearby. The whole settlement around the Church became a resort and omnibuses and carry-alls were run from the lower portions of the town and elsewhere over specially constructed plank roads.

About 1868, the interior of the Church was whitewashed over the decorations, and a wooden altar of inferior design, painted white, was erected on the sanctuary platform. Later the whitewash was removed, fortunately without material damage to the decorations. A new altar was also set up, the reredos repaired and metal railings installed around the sanctuary and on the balcony front.

On July 4, 1876, a large brick church just north of the Mission Church was dedicated. It was so badly damaged by the great earthquake of 1906 that it had to be razed, but the old mission church showed no damage.

About 1916, a group of San Franciscans undertook to restore the roof of the Church. With the approval of the Most Reverend Edward J. Hanna, Archbishop of San Francisco, this work was

executed under the direction of the late Willis Polk, architect, of San Francisco. A complete steel framework was inserted in the building, consisting of seven trusses with purlins and ceiling hangers, carried on columns let into chases in the adobe walls from the outside, and supported on concrete foundations. The chases were then filled in with concrete and the exterior walls plastered. All this work was accomplished without disturbing the original construction, including interior adobe walls, wood ceiling, and wood roof trusses. New wood rafters and roof sheathing were used, except for about twenty feet at the gable overhangs. The roof tiles are the original tiles relaid. Breakage and extra tile requirements were made up by tiles originally taken from the abandoned Mission San Antonio de Padua and used, first on buildings of the California Mid-Winter Fair of 1893, and subsequently on the Southern Pacific railroad station at Burlingame, California. The tiles on the out-buildings and the cemetery wall were new.

According to the records of the City Engineer's office in San Francisco, the present streets of the Mission District were established by survey of the United States Land Office, and approved by the Board of Supervisors and the Mayor on January 30, 1866. The work of grading Dolores Street, upon which the Church faces, was ordered August 8, 1901. This necessitated additional brick underpinning for the facade of the Church and a flight of steps at the entrance, changes which considerably altered the original proportions. It also necessitated the setting back of the cemetery walls, which encroached upon the present sidewalk.

At present the church is in good repair and is open to visitors as a relic, but is used only on special occasions. The offices of the church are performed in the large concrete building adjoining on the north, which replaced the brick church destroyed in the earthquake of 1906.

As has been brought out above, the Mission was built of crude materials (adobe and hand-hewn timber), by unskilled Indian labor. As a result, lines and surfaces are untrue to a degree that makes the problem of measurement extremely difficult. Displacement of the tape in any direction by a few feet may not infrequently produce a difference of as many inches in the dimension read. It is for this reason that the drawings, with the exception of those at the smallest scales, have in general been executed with free hand lines.

Author: CLARENCE WARD

Approved: *[Signature]*

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